

## **Legislative Aquatic Invasive Species Report Executive Summary**

In an effort to provide Montana with additional protection against invasive species, the 2009 Legislature passed the Aquatic Invasive Species Act. The departments of Agriculture and Fish, Wildlife and Parks were given responsibility to implement the Act.

As a result of the new legislation, Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) enhanced early detection monitoring and watercraft inspections. In 2009, FWP conducted 975 watercraft inspections at 18 different water bodies and monitored 254 sites across the state for aquatic invasive species. The department expanded watercraft inspections in 2010 to nearly 3,000 unique inspections. The inspections were carried out primarily at boat ramps and fishing access sites. Watercraft inspections were carried out on 38 different water bodies from May through October. Watercraft inspections have been found to be a very effective way to educate the public on aquatic invasive species prevention strategies.

The FWP Aquatic invasive species early detection and monitoring program was also expanded significantly during 2010 with monitoring conducted at 600 sites. Through the early detection program, FWP assisted the counties and Department of Agriculture in locating several new infestations of Eurasian watermilfoil. Additionally, organisms that were suspected to be dreissenid mussel larvae (zebra/quagga mussels) were found in routine sampling from Flathead Lake, since the initial suspect organisms were found no additional evidence of the presence of dreissenid mussels has been found. Additional surveying will occur during 2011. The FWP AIS early detection monitoring program also conducts monitoring for invasive fish pathogens including whirling disease and viral hemorrhagic septicemia.

In addition to conducting watercraft inspection and early detection efforts, FWP has taken the lead on development and implementation of a public information plan to address public awareness and outreach. The department has also been actively involved in conducting training and providing educational outreach materials to volunteer groups, lake associations, the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, and others interested in aquatic invasive species prevention and early detection.

While the Fish, Wildlife and Parks watercraft inspection program has primarily focused on inspections near water bodies, the Department of Agriculture has been targeting inspections along our borders at primary entry points into the state. In 2009, the Department of Agriculture (MDA) conducted 64 inspections at five voluntary inspection stations between

August and October. The MDA inspected 1,757 recreational vehicles at 18 roving border check stations from May through September in 2010. Both departments plan to continue to operate inspection stations. Based on discussions with federal, state, and county officials and law enforcement and the recent detections of Eurasian watermilfoil in the Missouri River and the suspect dreissenid mussel larvae in Flathead Lake, the inspection station strategy for 2011 has been revised to maximize prevention efforts.

In May of 2010, the Department of Agriculture established a management area for Eurasian watermilfoil for the Noxon/Cabinet Gorge area. As part of the management area, the department conducted mandatory inspection stations; 3,784 water craft inspections occurred at two inspection stations within Montana and another 3,000 inspections were conducted at an inspection station conducted collaboratively with Idaho. In August, reports of additional Eurasian watermilfoil infestations were confirmed in the Toston and Fort Peck areas. A statewide task force has been developed to provide guidance and planning assistance in addressing infestations.

In October of 2010, the Department of Agriculture hosted a statewide Invasive Species Summit. Based on comments received, the department has begun preparing an Invasive Species Strategic Plan and has begun planning for an annual Invasive Species Summit in 2011. The department has engaged in outreach and education through the inspection stations and to agricultural industries. The department will be working with the Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks to complete development of and implement outreach and awareness for the horticulture industry.